



Today's educators face limited resources and increased expectations for achievement. Research tells us the best way to close achievement gaps is by investing in early childhood. Across Kentucky, state funded preschool, Head Start, and child care programs are partnering to maximize resources and serve young learners and their families in the best way possible. This *Perspectives Special Report* provides details about elements of successful collaborations and examples from across the state.

Many collaborative models combine half-day preschool and quality child care programs in a single location to provide full-day learning experiences for children. Effective partnerships can include the local elementary school, quality child care programs and Head Start. These models leverage existing resources, such as funding for public preschool, child care assistance, USDA meals programs, and sometimes philanthropic dollars to provide wrap-around services that support early learners. School districts and communities can benefit from understanding the variety of possible collaborations to guide their development of an approach that works best for their children.

The greatest takeaway on preschool collaboration is that each community situation is unique. Services can be delivered in a wide variety of ways.

"The collaborative model allows communities to tailor partnerships to their unique community needs, whether they need more physical space, qualified teachers, or wraparound care for children from working families," says Terry Tolan, executive director of the Governor's Office of Early Childhood. "The goal is to offer high quality learning opportunities to the largest possible number of children. There are many pathways to accomplish that."

Assessing your local landscape, resources and needs, is important. "Plan in advance for collaborations," says Annie Rooney-French of the Kentucky Department of Education. "Building this collaborative relationship takes time. Schools and community partners need to take time to plan for collaboration, possible expansion and how to best meet the needs of the children and families in their community. Families need access to quality child care, and school districts must help ensure children come to school prepared to succeed."

Collaboration will be particularly important as the number of preschoolers eligible for services increases. Schools may be able to use space in existing child care centers instead of expanding classroom space. If preschool participation is an issue, partnering with a high-quality child care center for wraparound services might help families and children access preschool.

Major Factors to Consider

Effective collaborations focus on what is best for students and leverage each partner's resources. All parties need to decide together who might bring the best assets to each component of a potential partnership. Success often means thinking creatively to overcome challenges and take advantage of opportunities.

Leadership Successful collaborations for preschool depend on effective leadership and a basic understanding of the importance of early childhood. “A must have is leadership which is committed and focused on early childhood programming. I have had great principals I have worked with who are strong in the K-5 realm, but adding on preschool and the complexity of regulations and the attention that it requires is often a hard fit,” shares John Roden, Kentucky River Foothills Head Start. The ability to merge multiple systems and navigate varying needs is critical for a successful and sustained partnership. Identify an individual who can understand the requirements for preschool and child care and find ways to integrate the two.

Facilities Space within a school can be a limiting factor for expansion of preschool. Facilities may require a significant investment in infrastructure. Community-based child care programs may be able to provide the space needed to serve additional preschoolers. In some cases, space is not the issue. Instead, preschool participation may be an issue because parents need all-day care. In this case, a school might send a preschool teacher to the child care center or the child care center might provide a certified preschool.

Staff and Professional Development Finding qualified teachers can be a major limiting factor, especially in rural areas. Plans can be developed to phase in educational attainment in these situations. Often, a district will provide the lead teacher and a collaborating program provides the assistant. One of the benefits of collaboration is the strengthening of the early childhood workforce. Partners bring different expertise to the table and can strengthen one another. Providing joint professional development is one of the hallmarks of successful collaborations.

Monitoring and Regulations State-funded preschool, Head Start, child care programs, and various certification agencies have different sets of regulations and different requirements on data collection. Bringing together multiple systems is one of the challenges in collaboration. Clear communication among partners to understand the requirements of each program and how to streamline the processes is critical to the collaboration's success.

Financing There are three main public funding streams for collaboration: federal Head Start, state-funded preschool, and state and federal child care assistance. Many programs also receive funding from the USDA meals program. These dollars can be blended to develop a comprehensive early child program focused on the best environment for each child. Kentucky requires collaboration between public preschool and Head Start to maximize the use of state and federal dollars, but currently there is no requirement that high-quality child care programs also be allowed to provide preschool services. Philanthropic dollars are also an option.

Transportation Half-day preschool requires a major expenditure for transportation, especially in rural communities. Co-location of preschool services with wraparound care, either in a school building or high-quality child care center, will reduce or eliminate the cost of midday transportation. This can save money for the district or offset new costs incurred in a collaborative model. If transportation is still required in your collaborative model, costs might figure into where the best location for wraparound services might be located.

Recruiting Participation in preschool may be low for a variety of reasons: parents may need full-day services while they are at work, they may prefer child care where their child is not transported in the middle of the day, or they may not be able to transport their child if transportation is not provided. Collaborating to provide a full-day, full-year program may alleviate many of the barriers that keep children from accessing preschool and reduce competition between preschool and child care programs.

Examples of Collaboration in Kentucky

Child Care Partners to Provide State-Funded Preschool On-Site

In these partnerships, the school district generally sends a preschool certified teacher into a child care center. Often, the school district covers the cost of the teacher, and the center provides the classroom assistant. It could also be the case that the child care center provides the preschool certified staff person as well as the classroom assistant and contracts with the district for preschool funding for eligible students under its care. This type of partnership is referred to as a “contracted site” or “contracted slots” by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE). To be approved, the child care center and the school district must agree to partner in this way and the center is required to submit an application to KDE. The center must have a 3-STAR rating in the STARS for Kids Now quality rating system. KDE will accept an application from a 2 STAR program if it achieves a 3-STAR rating by the end of the school year. The center typically provides all resources and can use the USDA food program and the child care assistance program for eligible children. This model can reduce or eliminate midday transportation costs for the district.

Christian County – Hopkinsville Lets Go Play Academy and Christian County Schools. The school district sends a preschool certified teacher to the child care center to provide preschool services. The center provides the classroom assistant.

Perry County – New Beginnings Learning Center (NBLC) partners with Hazard/Perry County Schools. The center offers Head Start, state funded preschool and private high-quality child care in a fully blended classroom. Children receive a full-day program with wraparound services to meet families’ needs. The preschool teacher is paid half by the school system and half by New Beginnings.

Fayette County – University of Kentucky Early Childhood Development Lab partners with Fayette County Schools. The center provides state-funded preschool and Community Action Head Start. Fayette County Schools provides the preschool certified teacher and the center provides the classroom assistant. Visually Impaired Preschool Services is also a partner here, contracting slots for their students. Teachers are cross-certified with IECE and Teacher of Visually Impaired certification.

State-Funded Preschool Partners with Child Care at the School

This model offers services within an existing school building. In the case of a child care partnership, the center is often given existing classroom space, for which the center provides all of the licensing, resources and staff. The school offers half-day preschool, then walks the children to the child care room for additional preschool and/or extended day child care services. The child care center can access child care assistance funding for eligible children.

Boone County – Walton-Verona Independent/Boone County Schools and Children, Inc. Both school districts partner with Children, Inc., by providing a location on school property where the child care center offers a second “dose” of preschool services and before and after school care. The schools provide the classroom space and the child care center provides staff and resources for all care and activities before and after preschool.

Henderson County – Henderson County School District, Audubon Head Start and Henderson Child Development Center. The school district has twelve preschool classrooms providing a half-day program. The child development center is onsite to provide wraparound services and extend the school day.

Child Care Centers Partner to Provide Wraparound Services

Pendleton County – Pendleton County Schools partner with Small World Child Development Center and Lighthouse Learning Center child care centers. The district transports children to and from these two centers and pays the cost for children whose families need or want their children to receive wraparound services. The child care center can also access child care assistance program dollars for eligible children. This model allows the district to increase its preschool enrollment and decrease transportation costs by taking children to just two centers - one at each end of the rural county. The district is using the transportation savings to provide funding for child care.

Head Start Partnerships

Head Start has had a long history of collaboration in Kentucky. Collaboration between Head Start and state-funded preschool is required by statute (KRS 157.3175). These existing partnerships offer a great opportunity for expansion.

Daviess County – Owensboro Independent Schools and Hager Preschool built a building for preschool; Head Start paid for half, the district the other half. The school district has several classrooms in the building, Head Start the others. They offer fully blended classrooms onsite.

Madison County – Bright Beginning and Harvest Child Care collaborate with Head Start. The centers offer before and after care using child care assistance program funding for eligible children. Head Start provides the preschool program and provides a family service advocate to work with families. They see a culture change in the building after adding Head Start preschool resulting in higher quality, full-day programs.

Laurel County – Little Bears, Little Learners and Cornerstone all partner with Head Start. In this case, the center provides all resources and staff, including preschool. Head Start provides the family service advocates. Children are in one location all day and no transportation is necessary to provide wraparound services.

Benefits

Full-day, often year-round, services for children in one location with trusted adults.

Collaboration provides an opportunity to build on existing relationships and develop new ones.

Partnership allows for expanded and improved comprehensive services for young children and their families.

Resources and talents can be maximized as each partner contributes their unique areas of strength.

Alignment of expectations between programs will result in a stronger transition to kindergarten.

Family involvement increases as parents are more likely to drop off and pick up their child from an extended day program.

Shared networking and professional development between programs and staff can improve services to young learners and improve the overall early learning community.

Challenges

Monitoring, eligibility requirements and regulations can make it hard to integrate multiple services without redundancies and gaps.

Differing definitions of quality between systems can be challenging. One example is having to teach kids how to wash hands up to 5 different ways. This can be confusing for staff and students alike, as the training messages differ.

Blending multiple funding streams with different funding levels and eligibility criteria.

Lack of understanding and respect between systems. Building trust through communication is a critical component to overcoming this challenge.

Workforce shortages can make it hard to expand and meet program requirements.

Vocabulary can be a barrier to success. Different systems use different terminology. Understanding acronyms and clearly defining expectations will minimize misunderstandings.

Resources for Support and Guidance

Governor's Office of Early Childhood www.kidsnow.ky.gov

Kentucky Department of Education Preschool website <http://education.ky.gov/educational/pre/Pages/default.aspx>

Kentucky Department of Education application for a contract-ed site <http://education.ky.gov/educational/pre/Pages/Administrative-Documents.aspx>

Cabinet for Health and Family Services Division of Child Care STARS page <http://chfs.ky.gov/dccbs/dcc/stars/>

Contact the KDE consultants at 502-564-7056

Kentucky preschool statute <http://www.lrc.ky.gov/Statutes/statute.aspx?id=42321>

Resources that Informed this Report

Beyond the School Yard: Pre-K Collaborations with Community-Based Partners. PEW, 2009 <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/0001/01/01/beyond-the-school-yard>

A Center Piece of the Pre-K Puzzle: Providing State Funded Pre-kindergarten in Child Care Centers – National Women's Law Center, 2007, http://www.nwlc.org/our-resources/reports_toolkits/center-piece-of-the-prek-puzzle

Child Care, Head Start and Pre Kindergarten Collaboration: A Closer Look Policy Report" Education Development Center, 2012 http://ltd.edc.org/sites/ltd.edc.org/files/Closer_look_final.pdf

Many Thanks to Those Who Contributed to This Special Report

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